

What is claimed is:

1. A method for encoding and transmitting still picture images comprising:

receiving video frames at an input frame rate;

capturing ones of said video frames at a still picture capture rate which is less than the input frame rate;

providing the captured video frames to a video compressor at the input frame rate, wherein an already captured video frame is repeatedly provided to said video compressor at the input frame rate until a new frame is captured; and

transmitting the captured video frames after compression by said video compressor at a still picture repetition rate that is no less than said capture rate.

2. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein said input frame rate is about 30 frames per second.

3. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein said still picture repetition rate is within a range of about 1/30 to two frames per second.

4. A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein said still picture repetition rate is no greater than about 1/15 frames per second.

5. A method in accordance with claim 4 wherein said input frame rate is about 30 frames per second.

6. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein said video compressor compresses all of the captured frames as I-frames.

7. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein:
compressed captured video frames to be
transmitted are gated from the video compressor to a
buffer in accordance with the frame repetition rate;
and

the frames are provided as output from said
buffer for transmission at the frame repetition rate.

8. A method in accordance with claim 7 wherein
only selected ones of the compressed captured video
frames are gated into said buffer for transmission.

9. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the compressed, captured video frames are transmitted at a bit rate on the order of 100 Kbps to 200 Kbps.

10. Apparatus for encoding and transmitting still picture images comprising:

a selector adapted to receive video frames at an input frame rate and capture a subset of the video frames at a still picture capture rate which is less than the input frame rate;

a video compressor coupled to receive and compress the captured video frames at the input frame rate, wherein an already captured video frame is repeatedly provided to said video compressor at the input frame rate until a new frame is captured; and

a buffer coupled to receive the captured video frames after compression by said video compressor for subsequent transmission at a still picture repetition rate that is no less than said capture rate.

11. Apparatus in accordance with claim 10, further comprising:

a current frame buffer coupled to store the video frames prior to capture thereof by said selector; and

a previous frame buffer coupled to store the video frames captured by the selector.

12. Apparatus in accordance with claim 11 wherein said selector captures a current video frame from said current frame buffer, and subsequently repeatedly provides that frame from the previous frame buffer as input to the video compressor until a next current frame is captured at the still picture capture rate.

13. Apparatus in accordance with claim 10 wherein said video compressor compresses all of the captured frames as I-frames.

14. Apparatus in accordance with claim 10 further comprising a gate between said video compressor and said buffer, said gate being adapted to provide selected ones of the compressed video frames to the buffer in accordance with said still picture repetition rate.

15. A method for encoding and transmitting still picture images comprising:
compressing video frames at an input frame rate;

capturing ones of said compressed video frames at a still picture capture rate which is less than the input frame rate; and

providing the captured video frames for transmission at a still picture repetition rate that is no less than said capture rate;

wherein if the still picture repetition rate is greater than the capture rate, an already captured video frame is repeatedly provided for transmission at the still picture repetition rate until a new frame is captured.

16. A method in accordance with claim 15 wherein alternate captured video frames are stored in alternate memories, such that:

a first captured video frame can be repeatedly provided for transmission from a first memory at the still picture repetition rate while a second memory awaits storage of a second captured video frame, and

the second captured video frame can be repeatedly provided for transmission from said second memory at the still picture repetition rate while said first memory awaits storage of a subsequent captured video frame.

17. A method in accordance with claim 15 wherein said input frame rate is about 30 frames per second.

18. A method in accordance with claim 15 wherein said still picture repetition rate is within a range of about 1/30 to two frames per second.

19. A method in accordance with claim 18 wherein said still picture repetition rate is no less than about 1/15 frames per second.

20. A method in accordance with claim 19 wherein said input frame rate is about 30 frames per second.

21. A method in accordance with claim 15 wherein said video compressor compresses all of the captured frames as I-frames.

22. A method in accordance with claim 15 wherein the compressed, captured video frames are transmitted at a bit rate on the order of 100 Kbps to 200 Kbps.

23. Apparatus for encoding and transmitting still picture images comprising:

a video compressor coupled to receive and compress video frames at an input frame rate;

at least one memory coupled to store ones of said compressed video frames at a still picture capture rate which is less than the input frame rate;

said at least one memory being adapted to provide the stored video frames for transmission at a still picture repetition rate that is no less than said capture rate;

wherein if the still picture repetition rate is greater than the capture rate, an already stored video frame is repeatedly provided from the memory for transmission at the still picture repetition rate until a new frame is stored.

24. Apparatus in accordance with claim 23 wherein said at least one memory comprises:

first and second memories coupled to receive compressed video frames from said video compressor;

said first memory being responsive to a first write enable control input to store a first compressed video frame in accordance with said still picture capture rate, and being responsive to a first read enable control input to provide the first compressed

video frame as output in accordance with said still picture repetition rate; and

said second memory being responsive to a second write enable control input to store a second compressed video frame in accordance with said still picture capture rate, and being responsive to a second read enable control input to provide the second compressed video frame as output in accordance with said still picture repetition rate.

25. Apparatus in accordance with claim 24 wherein said write enable and read enable control inputs control said first memory to store a video frame while a previous video frame is being read from said second memory, and vice-versa.

26. Apparatus in accordance with claim 23 wherein said video compressor compresses all of the received frames as I-frames.